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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000954

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STATE FOR R,P, AND AF

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM IN DJIBOUTI

REF: SECSTATE 159129

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita D. Ragsdale.
For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Djibouti's Environment -----

1. (S) Djibouti's religious and cultural climate has been shaped by more than 150 years of French colonialism and traditional nomadic roots. The transitory nature of the Horn of Africa, the remnants of French culture, and the routine influx of foreigners from the region through the port has made Djibouti a relatively moderate and cosmopolitan state despite its ties to the Islamic world. Through all of its colonial history and 28 years of independence, Djibouti has practiced a moderate and tolerant form of Islam. However, influence from more traditional and fundamentalist Islamic countries in the region has been able to gain a significant foothold in the past decade. Extreme poverty, lack of economic opportunity and a growing disparity between socioeconomic classes make the population susceptible to fundamentalist - and occasionally extremist - influences. Left unchecked over the long term, these influences could tip the balance towards the fundamental version of Islam.

2. (S) Foreign aid is the largest source of outside influence in Djibouti. Donors like Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Development Bank that can pour money into communities quickly, without strings attached and on a large scale, are gaining goodwill among the population fairly easily. While the United States is one of the leading donors in Djibouti, its projects require close monitoring relative to other donors, are more long-term and are systemic in nature. Arabs and other donors tend to build schools and mosques, renovate hospitals and clinics and give educational scholarships - projects that provide more immediate impact and relief in the communities. These projects gain comparatively easy recognition. Embassy, military and USAID programs to Djibouti have garnered a significant amount of goodwill among the population. However, the current perception is that the United States gives money to the government, while Arab and other donors give to the people. In the long run, spheres of influence in Djibouti will be won by the country that is perceived to have given the most direct help to communities.

USG Programs to Counter Extremism -----

3. (S) Post programs have largely been designed with the view that improving daily conditions of life will decrease a person's susceptibility to extremism and violence. Integral to Post's public diplomacy strategy is Post's belief that programs that include person-to-person interaction between Americans and Djiboutians are the most effective way to improve America's image abroad, win hearts and minds and counter extremist propaganda. Programs include short-term and long-range projects with goals of both immediate, visible contributions and long-term, systemic change. A summary of Post programs are listed below:

Public Diplomacy Section Programs:

- English Language Groups- This program is a long-term project which started in January 2005. Its target audience is young Djiboutian men and women aged 18-30. Public Diplomacy began the program with only the PAO and the PAO assistant attending nightly conversation groups in private English language schools in several neighborhoods throughout the city. Each group has approximately 20-50 students in attendance each week. These groups discuss a different social topic chosen by the school each meeting and the discussion is reinforced by the Embassy with written material from Voice of America (VOA). In May 2005, PAO expanded attendance of Americans to include members of the U.S. military from the IO and PAO sections of Camp Lemonier. Post believes this is one of its most effective programs. It has given Embassy and military personnel the opportunity to learn first-hand about Djiboutian culture and challenges faced by youth. It has also introduced Americans and our values to Djiboutians, some of which had never met an American before this program. Many of the students participating in the groups attend Islamic schools during the day, giving the Embassy an opportunity to access a target audience that is otherwise difficult to reach.

- Activities for youth- Throughout the year, Public Diplomacy hosts and provides grants for one-time or short-term activities aimed at the poorer youth of Djibouti. The target audience is usually primary and secondary school students throughout the city. All of these activities promote a message of tolerance and understanding. Past activities have included essay contests, soccer tournaments, movie showings, training workshops and art exhibitions for International Education Week. These programs are fairly effective in promoting goodwill and providing person-to-person public outreach.

-Radio Sawa/VOA- In 2005, the International Board of Broadcasters' Radio Sawa transmitting station at PK-12 in Djibouti began 24 hour, 7 days per week broadcasting in a transmission arc that includes Djibouti, Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, renovations were completed by IBB on Radio Television Djibouti's two mediumwave and one short-wave transmitter at its Dorale radio station. Negotiations have recently begun for IBB to rent airspace on these transmitters for broadcasting in Afar, Oromo, Amharic, Tigrina and English. These transmissions will reach Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somaliland. IBB has no permanent presence on the ground in Djibouti and Post's Public Diplomacy Officer serves as its main administrator and negotiator in country. VOA is also transmitted in Djibouti. VOA is highly effective in Djibouti and "Special English" remains one of the most popular radio shows among Djibouti's youth. The effectiveness of transmissions to Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula are hard to gauge from Post.

-General Grants- Public Diplomacy annually gives grants to various civic groups throughout the country in an effort to establish a foothold in various communities. For example, PD funds provided exercise equipment for Muslim women at a moderate Islamic social service organization, an English language laboratory at the country's only university, and two libraries in English schools. This year PD grants will fund two youth centers in the districts, a Ramadan soccer tournament and a rap contest for International Education Week. These projects have been effective in gaining access to communities most vulnerable to extremism, especially youth with few alternative activities.

-International Visitors- Post's International Visitors program focuses on the country's mid-level bureaucrats with broad effectiveness. Former IVs have become influential in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chamber of Commerce and one is now the Minister of Women. In addition, Post has made efforts in the last year to integrate its IV alumni into other Embassy programs. They have served as judges for Embassy-sponsored contests and spoken at Embassy-sponsored conferences about their experiences in the US and have been very well-received.

DOD and U.S. Liaison Office Programs:

-Mil-to-Mil Training- USLO Djibouti, with the Combined-Joint Task Force - Horn Of Africa (CJTF-HOA), works with host government military to increase Djibouti's ability to recognize, respond to and prevent terrorism. Training exercises target the Djiboutian military counter-terrorism forces, which number approximately 500. While many of the programs do not directly work towards combating extremism, providing the equipment and training to the forces that secure borders and safeguard the country allows Djibouti to respond to threats from outside influences.

-Civil Affairs Projects- Civil Affairs battalions at Camp Lemonier have conducted operations throughout Djibouti and the entire Horn of Africa since the Camp was established in 2002. Projects in Djibouti include well drilling, rehabilitation of schools and clinics, medical and veterinary treatment in the countryside and polio vaccination campaigns. The target audience for these programs are rural communities with little to no resources. These projects have been extremely effective at improving quality of life for the communities, establishing personal ties with the United States, and bolstering a positive image of the U.S. and the U.S. military.

USAID Programs:

-Education and Health- USAID Djibouti is currently improving access, equity, quality and community participation in the education and health sectors. It is also focusing on strengthening NGOs in the two sectors. The programs support parliamentary approved reforms and are designed to be implemented over several years with long-term effect. USAID opened a country office in Djibouti in 2003 and funds its programs with State Economic Support Funds. The office's programs have rehabilitated existing schools and clinics throughout the country and provided technical assistance and training to government officials in health and education administration. USAID has slightly modified the existing French curriculum by adapting texts which reflect a more positive image for young girls and that illustrate an expanded role of women in society.

14. (S) Post's programs do not include measures to explicitly monitor or counter incitement and hate speech in Djibouti. As part of their regular duties, Public Diplomacy and Political Affairs Sections monitor regional and local French, Arab, and Somali news sources for stories of interest. Because 98 percent of the population is Muslim, Post's normal programming and activities are also aimed at countering extremism.

15. (S) A majority of Post's programs are aimed at the local communities. Many of these programs include a message of tolerance and non-violence. For programs that do not have this message built-in, Post takes every opportunity to share this message with the community within the framework of the program. The most frequent occurrence of this is during speeches given by the Ambassador at various public ceremonies and project inaugurations. The Public Diplomacy Section ensures that statements to the press or speeches given by the Ambassador and other members of the Mission reflect both Washington's and Post's counter-extremism messages. Public Diplomacy also works closely with the Public Affairs Office at Camp Lemonnier to ensure that Embassy and Military messages are coordinated.

16. (S) Post Public Diplomacy programs have identified several community associations that have broad influence among Muslim youth and the population as a whole. Al Biri, a moderate Islamic charitable organization, works on many fronts to improve the conditions of life in Djibouti. United Youth for Progress is an association geared towards language and civic activities, which puts on skits and plays to address difficult societal issues and raise awareness among the population. Shiny Flower is another youth association that promotes civic activities. None of these organizations are using the Internet as a tool to counter extremism. Associations tend to use radio and print media to promote their messages.

Host Government Efforts to Counter Extremism -----

17. (S) The Government of Djibouti has not made any efforts to create spaces for open intellectual debate through the media and internet. Freedom of the Press is granted by law, but is not always respected in practice.

18. (S) Djibouti's Renseignements Generaux (General Intelligence) Unit of the police has the responsibility for keeping tabs on the population, including identifying those individuals that pose a threat to the Government or foreign citizens. This unit reports to the National Security Service, which is the entity with overall responsibility for intelligence. Weekly sermons given in the mosques of Djibouti are monitored and the Government has reigned in Imams preaching messages that are too extreme.

19. (S) The Government has not made any recognizable efforts to amplify voices of moderation, tolerance and freedom.

110. (S) The Government has made a considerable effort in the past few years to encourage readily accessible public education. Working with USAID, it aims to reach a minimum of 90 percent enrollment for school-age children. Since the beginning of the focus on education in 2000, enrollment rates have increased from 39 percent of the school-age population to 53 percent in 2005. Using the French curriculum, Djibouti's education system does teach pluralism and open intellectual exchange. The Government of Djibouti, in conjunction with USAID and other donors, has launched national campaigns to encourage schooling for girls. The Minister of Education has also expressed a desire to have access to the curriculum taught at Islamic schools throughout the country to ensure that it uses the Djiboutian system. The education system does not promote scientific learning, although basic science curriculums are covered.

RAGSDALE